

This scale can serve as an online assessment tool to assist organizations and community partnerships in determining how they involve youth in programs, whether youth are becoming more engaged in the community, and if certain strategies are helping retain youth. This scale can be set up on its own separate webpage, showing one to five items at a time (similar to examples on Survey Monkey). After the survey is completed, the average score for each section should be computed and presented to the individual to inform them on whether youth involvement, engagement, and retention are at low, average, or high levels within the program (see descriptions at the end of the scale below).

Involvement and Engagement Assessment Tool

A key component to acquiring positive youth development is to make sure youth not only have quality experiences, but are also fully engaged as active participants. This includes youth having a role in developing programs that can benefit their well-being as well as their communities. However, this process takes time. It is suggested that organizations and community-based partnerships desiring opportunities for youth to put their leadership skills into practice should examine how the process is going at least every six months. This scale gives you a chance to assess the levels at which youth are participating in your program(s) and the community. Please take a moment to respond to the statements below. Please indicate at what level you agree or disagree.

Youth Involvement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Youth take lots of initiative working on projects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Youth are always busy with things to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Youth arrive to meetings/events on time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Youth take ownership when responding to specific tasks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Youth rely on themselves to make key decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Youth always share ideas about things that matter to them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Youth help one another learn new skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Youth are fully committed to their duties.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Youth are very excited about their involvement with this project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Youth are involved at all levels of program development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Youth Engagement (within the Community)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. Youth display a willingness to accept leadership responsibilities in their community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Youth have full access to information that is needed to make decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Youth express a genuine interest in the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Youth display a desire to help others in their community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Youth display a desire to mentor other youth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Youth take part in discussions at community forums/hearings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Youth are applying what they learn by getting involved in other community activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Youth take pride in their community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. Youth seek the advice of adults in the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20. Youth come up with their own ideas for improving the community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Youth are involved in several community-based projects.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. Youth express a sense of belonging toward their community.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. Youth are very concerned about community change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Youth Retention

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
24. Youth are recruiting their peers to join the program.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. A majority of the projects are led by youth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. Youth consult with adults on project activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. Staff/volunteers (adults) have the skills to serve as mentors to youth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. The ideas of this project were generated mostly by youth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. Most youth have no difficulty in getting to the meetings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. Adults feel comfortable working with assertive youth.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31. Youth make decisions based on their own experiences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32. Some youth have been involved in this project for one year or more.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

33. As older youth leave the program, they are replaced by their younger peers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34. Youth see this experience as a chance to socialize with friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
35. Youth choose to work on this project instead of other activities (e.g., playing sports, watching TV).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
36. Youth are routinely recognized for their accomplishments.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
37. Youth make efforts to attend every meeting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
38. Most of the youth return to this program year after year.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
39. Youth are passionate about the issues addressed by this project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
40. Youth recognize their strengths in working as members of the team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
41. Youth feel challenged to do their best.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Instructions for Using the *Involvement and Engagement Assessment*

1. **Youth development professionals (e.g., youth workers, teachers, 4-H agents/educators) who work closely with youth should complete the *assessment tool*.** Completing the survey should take place after the group has been working together for a while (i.e., near the middle of the project/program). Waiting until the middle of the program gives the person completing the assessment an opportunity to more thoroughly examine the extent to which youth are involved as leaders. Administering the scale too soon does not allow for accurate perceptions of experiences.
2. **Examine the computed mean scores (averages) to determine whether there are high or low levels of youth involvement and community engagement and whether retention of youth is at risk.** The items on the scale are grouped accordingly. The scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), determining whether the program provides positive or negative experiences toward each of the three areas. An average score for each category between 1 and 2.4 would be classified as “low,” while scores between 2.5 and 3.4 could be considered “average” and 3.5 or above would be classified as “high.” Compare this average to the table below to determine which areas may need improvement. The arrows in the chart only signify whether levels are “low” (↓) or “high” (↑).

Level of Youth Involvement, Community Engagement and Youth Retention existing within Community Programs

Youth Involvement	Community Engagement	Youth Retention	Description
↑	↑	↑	High levels of youth involvement, high youth engagement, high youth retention. Desired results for youth-driven initiatives; Optimal program for PYD. This scenario reveals a program that is youth-driven, being led by young people who are empowered to promote change. They are beyond mere involvement, but are putting into practice those leadership skills that have been developed and mastered over time. Programs reflecting youth participation at this level also implement practices that are not episodic, but consistent and sustained. This is apparent due to the high number of youth willing to remain an active part of the program (i.e., high retention). This in turn, provides youth with access to roles as decision-makers and opportunities to contribute to their own development.
↑	↓	↑	Low levels of engagement; See tips on increasing community engagement among youth.
↓	↑	↑	Low levels of involvement; See tips on increasing youth involvement.
↑	↓	↓	Low community engagement and youth retention; This could be a situation where most of the youth participants are younger and the older youth are leaving for various reasons. Take time to determine if the youth are disengaged and leaving because of bad experiences. At the same time, be sure to focus on the youth who are involved and build their skills in hopes of preparing them for higher engagement.
↓	↑	↓	High community engagement only; This is what can happen when older youth are leaving the program and are getting involved in broader roles throughout their community. Follow up with them to determine if your program had a role in their success and desire to pursue higher levels of community engagement. If so, take pride in knowing that this is truly a major goal of PYD; especially if youth are serving in leadership roles within

Adapted from Jones, K.R. (2006). *Youth-adult partnerships: Are you there yet? How to evaluate your youth development program*. Cooperative Extension Service. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky.

			other groups/organizations.
↑	↑	↓	High youth involvement and community engagement, with low youth retention; This can occur when youth are forced to choose other options (e.g., jobs, organized sports, graduation), despite having positive experiences within a particular program.
↓	↓	↑	Low youth involvement and community engagement, with high youth retention; This can occur when youth are only allowed to serve as passive participants. They may be a part of a program, but the level of involvement is at a point where they have no role in decision-making. This is most common with a younger audience; teens rarely settle for and remain in such settings.
↓	↓	↓	Low youth involvement and community engagement, low youth retention; At this point, a PYD approach is nonexistent. It may be time to get on board with new strategies! Form community collaborations to determine what youth in the area really need; Solicit the help of caring adults willing to mentor and partner with youth and most importantly, ask youth for advice!

Note. ↓ (1-2.4) = Low; ↑ (3.5 - 5) = High (A score ranging from 2.5 - 3.4 would be considered “average”).

Youth Involvement: Youth demonstrate high levels of active participation. They are willing to work with others while also taking on leadership roles. They feel a sense of belonging and therefore are at ease in sharing their ideas, while welcoming the opinions of others. At high levels of involvement, youth have full access to details that assist in their social, intellectual, and leadership development. Also, those programs with high involvement are not controlled by adults, but foster a youth-led approach, allowing young people to take ownership. Youth are intrinsically motivated to embrace the responsibilities of projects and take advantage of the opportunity to have their ideas heard, considered, and implemented.

Steps to consider if you wish to enhance youth involvement in your program/group:

- Recruit youth who are experienced leaders and pair them with those that are younger and/or less experienced.
- Make sure youth are afforded opportunities for independence; give them chances to make decisions and express their opinions.
- Whenever possible, allow youth to decide what project they want to implement; when they have ownership, commitment levels increase.
- Have adult support in place to assist when it is solicited; despite their independence, youth still want help from adults when needed.

Youth Engagement in the Community: Youth engagement refers to youth contributing to their own development by applying learned life skills and being afforded the chance to function as decision-makers (Scheve, Perkins, & Mincemoyer, 2006). Youth have the confidence to take on leadership roles and the competence to make informed decisions. Therefore, they seek out opportunities to participate in youth-driven programs and initiatives. Youth are also applying their skills by getting involved in other organizations, participating in civic affairs and serving on boards and councils.

Steps to consider if youth engagement seems average at best, or low:

- Take time during program meetings to discuss issues affecting the community. Both youth and adults should bring topics to the meeting.
- Invite community leaders to come and speak to youth about issues in the community.
- Let youth decide if they want to develop action plans to address any specific concerns. This allows the youth to have ownership from the very beginning. If they are not passionate about a particular issue, the likelihood of their willingness to become engaged decreases substantially.
- Youth-adult partnerships are very useful in promoting youth engagement. A partnership can provide youth with several adult mentors who may have a better understanding of the community and can impart this wisdom upon youth. On the other hand, youth can provide their expertise on those issues that are important to them and their peers. Also, social change can be a daunting process for those new to community organizing. Partnerships can balance the responsibilities between youth and adults as they strive to make a difference.
- If youth are not ready to take on issues on a broader scale, don't force them. It may be wise to spend more time developing their leadership and social skills (through involvement) in order to equip them for civic engagement.

Youth Retention: Success in retaining youth in programs is demonstrated by youth consistently returning to the program on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. It should be clear that they are making a choice to participate when they have other options to choose (i.e., serving in this program in lieu of sports or going home to play video games). Key indicators that foster retention include, but are not limited to: caring, supportive adults; opportunities to connect/socialize with peers; recognition for their efforts; the chance to make decisions; opportunities to enjoy the challenge of serving and being recognized as community decision-makers; a vested interest in the issues being addressed. It is also important that, as older youth leave (due to graduation, jobs, etc.), additional youth join the team to sustain efforts.

Steps for retention may include:

- Try not to demand too much or expect too little out of a young person; heavy demands can cause stress and frustration, while too little can be perceived as a waste of their time.
- Allow time for socializing among peers; youth need to recognize the program as a venue to have fun. The news will spread quickly when a group of youth can tell others about opportunities that build confidence while having a good time.
- Be sure youth are involved from beginning to end; this contributes to feeling valued.
- Be assertive in recruiting younger youth to gain experience while being mentored by older peers.
- Utilize the expertise of adult volunteers by allowing them to work with youth to help create/enhance programs that are more appealing.
- Recognize youth (formally and informally) for their efforts on a regular basis.
- Change the focus; if the youth keep changing (coming for a short time and then leaving the program), then it may be time to change the program/project!